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NSC BRIEFING

31 OCTOBER 1956

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 SOVIET POLICY TOWARD SATELLITES

- I. Events in Eastern Europe continue outstrip Soviet policy, and Moscow offer negotiate withdrawal Sov troops from Hungary, Rumania and Poland may be too little too late.
 - A. Beleaguered Soviet leaders desperately trying regain influence.
 - B. Wish to avoid compromising self-initiated "liberalization" program.
 - C. But may have to--as only way to stop snowballing threat to control in Eastern Europe.
- II. In both action and appearance Soviet leaders confused and unrealistic.
 - A. Khrushchev, in recent conversation, blamed Polish and Hungarian difficulties on their excessive rate of industrialization, claiming USSR had warned them on this.
 - 25X1X B. [REDACTED] on 29 Oct Soviets could have "crushed Poles like flies" but had shown great restraint. Conversation confirmed that Soviets seriously considered force in Poland.
 - 25X1X C. [REDACTED] that Hungary illustrated what "small organized group" could do, that masses rarely took any initiative of their own.
- III. At public appearances, bearing of Soviet leaders has read like fever chart.
 - A. On 25 October, they subdued and quiet at reception. Bulganin tired and depressed; Khrushchev lacked usual exuberance; Kagonovich and especially Molotov more at ease.
 - B. On 29 October, they appeared considerably better spirits--suggesting they had reached presidium decision on Hungary.

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C. On 30 October, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov and Kagonovich noticeably more glum--possibly connected with Soviet troop' withdrawal from Budapest.

IV. These surface signs of strain appeared only recently, but series unsuccessful stop-gap actions since summer have reflected increasing desperation and weakness.

A. Latest action--30 Oct Soviet declaration on relations with Satellites--amounts almost to capitulation.

B. That Soviet leaders did not intend it to be capitulation is evidenced by

1. great emphasis placed on Warsaw pact as necessary to protect Communist system.

ii. Pointed omission of East Germany from list of countries where continued presence of Soviet troops subject to negotiation.

C. 30 Oct declaration unlikely to influence course of nationalist tide among both Communists and non-Communists in Poland and Hungary.

1. Nagy, for example, has now called for withdrawal from Warsaw Pact.

V. Soviet leadership thus faced, at best, with glum prospect of Polish and Hungarian deviation--disease likely to be communicated to increasingly restive East Germany, as well as other Satellites.

A. This ugly picture puts considerable strain on Sov "collective leadership."

B. Bohlen on 31 Oct saw no obvious sign of dissension.

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C. However, additional setback for Soviet policy--for example, possibility of setback in Near East--could be final straw.

VI. Khrushchev and Bulganin more subject to criticism than Molotov, who opposed Eastern European policy, or Kaganovich.

A. Opposition to K and B in Party Presidium might win support from military leadership wanting maintain firm control border areas.

i. But Zhukov, in 29 Oct talk with Bohlen, stuck to party line, indulging in mixture untruths, half truths, some elements fact on Hungarian situation.

ii. Zhukov also attempted assume "soldier's" attitude in defense Soviet troops in Hungary. Stated he not politician; function of Army was to carry out orders.

B. Other elements of support for opposition:

i. important members economic bureaucracy who base future bloc development on closer integration Soviet and Satellite economies.

ii. Stalinist elements.

C. Much depends on whether first-string team--Khrushchev (with his strength in Central Committee and among provincial party leaders) Bulganin and Mikoyan--remain united.

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